

# History of Denison Dam & Lake Texoma



## Short History & Some Facts About The Lake Texoma Area

### Local History

On the north shore of the Washita arm of Lake Texoma in northwestern Bryan County lies the partially restored ruins of old [Fort Washita](#). The frontier military post was built on a site selected and named by [Gen. Zachary Taylor](#), who became the first post commander in 1843, and later president of the United States. The fort was garrisoned by United States troops until May 1, 1861, when it was abandoned to Confederate forces. Although Fort Washita was not used as a military establishment after the Civil War, the post office continued in operation until 1880. The site is kept open to the public by the [Oklahoma Historical Society](#).

Bronze plaques mark several of the watering stops in the Lake Texoma area that were used to change horses or to pick up mail when the 2,796-mile-long [Overland Butterfield Stagecoach](#) Line was in existence. See also [Stagecoach Lines](#).

The [Chisholm](#) and [Shawnee trails](#), over which cattle were driven through Texas and Oklahoma to the markets in Kansas, also crossed this area. Just below Denison Dam is the old Colbert's crossing, which later became a ferry, and later yet, a toll bridge. It was an early day crossing for Indians, military expeditions, outlaw gangs, Texas road freights, and prairie schooners.

In Denison, a President of the United States was born in a white gabled two-story house by the side of a railroad track on October 14, 1890. He was [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) whose birthplace has been restored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Departments.

In the Preston Bend area, beside the relocated Preston Cemetery, a granite marker commemorates the Indian Trading Post established in 1837 by Holland Coffee and is now submerged by Lake Texoma.

Tishomingo boasts the last capitol of the old Chickasaw Nation, a native granite building of Victorian architecture standing on top of a hill. Adjacent to the capitol is the Chickasaw Council House Museum dating for 1856. Close at hand are the ruins of the Chickasaw Male Academy established in 1850. Also located near Tishomingo at Emet, Oklahoma is the "[Chickasaw White House](#)". It was once considered a mansion on the frontier. It was home to Chickasaw Governor Douglas Hancock Johnston and his family from 1898 to 1971.

At the west edge of Kingston is the Camp' Leavenworth marker erected in memory of the ill-fated expedition of 1834 made of the Dragoon Regiment. The site of Camp

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Leavenworth (probably about 4 miles south of the marker is now inundated by Lake Texoma.

In Durant, first settled by the Choctaw family of that name in 1870, you may see some of the early day galleried residences with high ceilings and big windows which reflect the influence of the old southern plantation owners' townhouses. These are characteristics of many fine old southern home, which settlers built up and down the valley.

### Short Dam History and Development

Denison Dam and Lake Texoma were authorized for construction by the Flood Control Act approved June 28, 1938, (public Law No. 761, 75th Congress, 3rd Session) for flood control and generation of hydroelectric power. The dam, spillway and outlet works were started in August 1939, and completed in February 1944 at a cost of \$78,307,000. When completed in 1944, Denison Dam was America's largest rolled, earth-filled dam. The dam is now the 12th largest in volume in the United States. The project was put into operation for flood control in January 1944. The first hydroelectric turbine was placed in operation in March 1945 and a second unit in September 1949. The power-intake structure will permit future installation of three additional power units.

The lake has crested the dam's [spillway](#) at a height of 640 ft (195.07 m) three times: once in 1957, again in 1990, and most recently on July 7, 2007.

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## INTRODUCTION

If one could have viewed the Red River near Denison, Texas, during its normal low flow conditions prior to construction of the Denison Dam, he would have found few indications of the stream's mighty power. Normally, the river meanders like a serpent's tail across the countryside flowing lazily toward the Mississippi from its origin on the [Staked Plains \(Llano Estacado\)](#) near the eastern edge of New Mexico. From a low flow of less than 2000 cubic feet per second (cfs) the "mighty Red" flowed 470,000 cfs in 1908 and 600,000 cfs in 1843. These and other devastating floods brought about intensive studies, which led to the construction of the Denison Dam to form Lake Texoma. The history of Lake Texoma began in the early 1900's when studies for a dam on Red River were begun. The proposed construction of the lake was the subject of many heated political debates and the former governor of Oklahoma, W.H. (Alfalfa Bill) Murray, called the dam "the biggest folly ever proposed." Leon C Philips, Oklahoma governor during construction of the dam, labeled the project unconstitutional and twice carried his futile fight for work-stopping injunctions to the United States Supreme Court. Most of the controversy stemmed from the purchase of almost 200,000 acres of farmland, which was removed from production and taxation. Opponents of the dam did not realize that eventually the counties affected would receive more income from their share of payments from lake resorts and other leases on government property than they would have collected as taxes from the land without the dam. The birth of lake such as Lake Texoma involves many years of planning, political maneuvering, and dozens of reports. The first recorded official report concerning Lake Texoma (then known as Denison Reservoir) was made on January 21, 1927, under the provisions of House Document 308, Sixty-ninth Congress, first session. The land area covered by Lake Texoma is rich in folklore and western history. Many important crossing sites on Red River were located in the lake region and numerous archeological sites were also present. Preservation of the historical sites and salvaging of artifacts from the archeological sites were important considerations during the planning of the lake. As one studies the history of this large project, he becomes aware of the tremendous efforts that must be made in order to coordinate the dozens of private and public interests which must be welded together in order for the project to become a reality. This report is divided into various sections to emphasize the important events in each period of development. Even though most of the references used in the preparation of the report are of a technical nature and contain many figures and facts, an attempt has been made to word the report in a general manner rather than allow it to become simply a listing of technical facts.

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### I. PRE-CONSTRUCTION DAYS

#### The Countryside

In 1938, when the Denison Dam project was authorized, the area affected by the lake consisted primarily of farming and grazing land with large fruit and pecan orchards located in the valleys. The area was suffering from a serious economic depression. Jobs were hard to find and many people were simply existing -living on relief or raising vegetables, hogs, cattle, and other farm products in an effort to feed their families and have enough left over to sell and purchase other necessities.

Transportation was a problem. Roads were poor, and since there were few bridges on the streams, numerous ferry sites were necessary. Some of these ferry sites were historic, dating back to early settlement days. Examples of those historic sites were the Colbert Ferry located near Colbert, Oklahoma just downstream from the Damsite, and Baer's Ferry located at the Damsite. A few small villages were located in the edge of the river valley or on higher ground near the river. These villages consisted of a cotton gin, general store, and a few homes. Most of the villagers were older people who had settled in the valley and were content to remain there to die. The younger generations would not stay "on the farm" because of poor living conditions and poor pay.

The economy of the area had depended primarily on cotton for many years. Farming was just beginning to move out of this one crop situation. Madill and Durant in Oklahoma and Denison in Texas as well as many other towns were slowly dying and many vacant business buildings could be found. At the time that the Denison District of the Corps of Engineers was established in Denison, Texas, very little difficulty was experienced in locating sufficient buildings to house the large number of offices.

Industry in the lake area consisted of large railroad shops, a cotton mill, a Kraft food plant, poultry and eggplant, and other miscellaneous plants in Denison, cotton gins throughout the area, and oil field activity and offices.

The lake area covers parts of six counties, Grayson and Cooke Counties in Texas and Bryan, Marshall, Love and Johnston Counties in Oklahoma. The main counties affected by the lake are Grayson County in Texas and Bryan and Marshall Counties in Oklahoma.

Wildlife in the area consisted primarily of small game such as bobwhite quail, fox squirrel, cottontail and swamp rabbits, furbearers such as the opossum, striped skunk and raccoon, and varieties of waterfowl. The area lies within the Central Flyway, which is a major waterfowl migration route. Only a few ducks and geese spend the winter in the vicinity, but they are plentiful during fall and spring migration periods. Considerable large game inhabited the area during early territorial days; however, following statehood of Oklahoma, the large game practically disappeared. Fishing on the Red and Washita Rivers was accomplished primarily by the use of trotlines and nets used in taking commercial types of fish such as catfish, carp, buffalo, and similar species. The main river channel was restocked periodically when floods covered old cutoff lakes in the

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valley. These cutoff lakes were excellent breeding grounds for numerous species of fish, and served as excellent sources of stock for Lake Texoma when it was formed.

Red River which forms the main arm of Lake Texoma rises near the eastern boundary of New Mexico and flows in a generally eastward direction for a distance of approximately 1,350 miles to join the Mississippi River. It has one of the largest watersheds of any river in the United States, covering an area of 91,430 square miles, fifty percent larger than New England. Denison Dam is located at about river mile 751 from the mouth of Red River. The drainage area above the dam includes 39,719 square miles, portions of which are located in New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. At the source, the elevation of Red River is about 3,500 feet. From this elevation, the river drops to about 1,900 feet near Childress, Texas, 850 feet near Henrietta, Texas, and 510 feet near Denison, Texas. In the vicinity of Denison, the slope of the stream is about 1 foot-per-mile, which is much flatter than it is in the headwater area.

The headwater region of the Red River lies in a semiarid plains area. The river drainage of this region gradually develops from stream courses that ordinarily carry water only intermittently due to the sparse rainfall, the porosity of the soils, the steep stream slopes, and evaporation. In general, the stream banks are low, poorly defined, unstable, and widely spaced with large, flat sand deposits between. Due to the nature of the terrain, the flooded area above the Damsite was small and relatively unimportant as compared to the area below the Damsite. This was due to the valley being somewhat restricted and more rugged in the upper reaches of the river and widening out to allow large, relatively level, tillable areas below the Damsite. In 1935, in the reach of the river from the Denison Damsite to the Texas-Arkansas line, 153,000 acres of cleared land were inundated by floodwaters from the Red River. If the Denison Dam had been in operation at that time, all but about 10 percent of this area would have been protected. In 1876, a flood occurred which was referred to as a great disaster by local newspapers. The 1876 flood, even though termed a "Great Disaster," was of smaller magnitude than one in 1908, which had an indicated discharge of 600,000 cubic feet per second at Denison. The 1876 flood caused the loss of two important Red River bridges, which had been completed the previous year -the MKT Railroad Bridge and the Colbert toll bridge. A quotation from the Denison Herald on July 4, 1876, stated: "Sir Thompson of Thompson's Ferry was in town Monday and reports that when the recent rise on Red River first showed it self, it came in a body fully 7 feet high and from bank to bank, sweeping everything before it. The ferry boats above his place are mostly gone."

Prior to the construction of the Denison Dam, flood damage in the Red River valley was chiefly confined to the agricultural lands and crops. Very few works of man, such as cities, villages, highway or railway bridges, or even farm buildings and dwellings were located in the flood plain. Crop damages by floods were so extensive in the valley that they constituted a major economic problem to the landowners, tenants and sharecroppers. It was common practice for the farmers to plant their crops over at least once during a season due to inundation by floodwaters.

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In the early days of the settlement of the Southwest, the Red River served as an important transportation route from the Mississippi River westward. Travel in those times was by river, supplemented later by stagecoaches and wagon trains. Jefferson, Texas, which is on Cypress Bayou, an arm of the Red River near Shreveport, Louisiana, was the head of navigation on Red River before the railroads were built. A small amount of commerce was moved on the Red River above Jefferson, Texas, but this was limited greatly due to the channel depth, snags, sandbars, etc. Jefferson, Texas was founded in 1836, and served as the principal shipping and distribution points for eastern and northern Texas for many years. It was the largest city in Texas, reaching a population of 35,000 shortly after the Civil War. When railroad construction reached a high rate in the 1870's, waterway commerce to Jefferson practically ceased, and the population declined until in 1936, it was only 2,400. Several attempts have been made to promote navigation on the Red River above the Texas-Arkansas line to Denison, but the efforts have failed due to the expenses and problems involved.

### Locating the Dam

Denison Dam is located at the narrowest part of the Red River valley below the Washita River. The riverbed in the vicinity is 800 to 1000 feet wide. The south or Texas bluff is 150 to 200 feet high and fairly steep. On the north, the river bed is bordered by steep bluffs rising 30 to 40 feet to a level overbank section, extending 1,800 feet to another steep bluff about 50 feet high, beyond which the land rises gently for approximately two miles.

Of Seven possible locations, the present site of Denison Dam was chosen for the general location as it affords the most economical site measured by the volume of embankments, the best available foundations for outlet works, and the topography permitted the spillway to be constructed independent of the main dam.

The feasibility of a flood control dam and a combined power and flood control dam near Denison, Texas has been covered in six reports during the period 1930 to 1938.

The location of the dam was fixed so that it would (1) include control of floods from the 'Washita River, a tributary of the Red River which flows into the Red River 10 miles above Denison, Texas; (2) have adequate foundations for the embankment, outlet works, and spillway, (3) and have the most economical section for construction.

An inspection of the topographic maps of the area shows that the range of possible locations is within a reach of about 10 miles from the mouth of the Washita River to a point just north of Denison, Texas. Five general locations were laid out in this area. Quantity estimates were made along with studies of the general geology of each site to locate suitable foundations. The five sites which were studied lay between what is now known as the Preston Peninsula and the Highway 75 Bridge. Site "A" ran generally east from the tip of Preston Peninsula. Site "B" and "C" were located between Site "A" and the present dam. Site "D" was located where the dam now stands and was chosen as

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the best site. Site "E" was located between the present dam and the Highway 75 Bridge.

The selected site provided safe construction of either a rolled-fill or hydraulic-fill embankment. Outlet works with either tunnels or conduits in open cut could be placed in the Texas abutment with all outlet structures on Goodland limestone, except the powerhouse, which would be on Trinity Sand formation. The Texas side also provided the safest and most economical location for the spillway. A 2000-foot long concrete spillway was proposed with a paved discharge channel, which would empty into Shawnee Creek without danger to the embankment.

### The Battle for Approval

The early efforts toward Red River development were concerned with navigation. Various schemes with some limited operation were evolved over a period of many years. For years before proposed river improvement became generally popular, the late Dr. Alex W. Acheson, Denison pioneer doctor, preached the gospel of Red River navigation. It was a triumph for him when citizens met in Denison and organized the Red River Flood Control and Navigation Association, of which he was honorary vice president.

While Dr. Acheson's idea did not include a dam, his relentless campaigning in behalf of boats on Red River accomplished much in focusing attention on the stream. When the idea of a hydroelectric flood control dam began to attract attention, many influential persons over the nation already were familiar with the river itself, largely through Dr. Acheson's efforts. He addressed the United States Senate and set the lawmakers on the edges of their seats. There is no record of the waterway associations, boards, hearings, and other meetings that thrilled to the old man's passionate plea for "the greatest inland empire in the world." It was a red-letter day for Dr. Acheson when the Annie P, a paddle-wheel steamer, traveled up from Shreveport, LA., in 1905, and he spark-plugged the celebration. The Annie P made two trips from Shreveport to Denison that summer.

Another early Denisonian, the late George D. Moulton, has been called the "Father of the Dam Idea." As early as March 1926, Mr. Moulton was attempting to gather interest in his idea of a Red River dam. He wrote to [Congressman Charles D. Carter of Oklahoma](#) asking that contour maps of what today is the Denison Dam Basin be sent to him. With the contour maps furnished by Congressman Carter, Mr. Moulton traced the 700-foot contour, outlining a gigantic reservoir that could be created by constructing a dam on Red River. His study of the map indicated one logical site for the dam - at Baer's Ferry. It is significant to note that United States Engineers, making the official project survey years later, studied more than a dozen possible dam sites, upstream and downstream from Baer's Ferry, but invariably returned to the location penciled on Mr. Moulton's contour map - where (at the time of its construction) the world's largest rolled-fill earthen embankment was built. Mr. Moulton suggested a dam on the 650-foot

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contour. The spillway elevation of the completed project is at the 640-foot level and the top of the flood pool is at 645.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries began to get flood control attention and the Red River Flood Control and Navigation Association was formed in Denison with Mr. Moulton as secretary. The Denison Dam idea gradually gathered momentum. Costly floods on the Mississippi focused new attention on the importance of flood control. Employment brought on by the depression bred a public works program that kindled a thinking receptive to projects like Denison Dam. The East Texas Chamber of Commerce endorsed the Red River proposal and the Texas legislature passed resolutions urging its' construction.

The [Denison Chamber of Commerce](#) and others were campaigning in behalf of the project. Committees were sent to Washington, to almost every meeting which dealt with waterway improvement, and congressional leaders, notably [Sam Rayburn](#), were spearheading the movement in Washington.

Organization of the [Red River Valley Improvement Association](#) which represented Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas expanded the movement and give new momentum. US Engineers were sent to Denison in 1936, to make a preliminary survey.

Numerous local persons supported and worked for the Denison Dam and Reservoir Project for more than 20 years. The Red River Improvement Association worked hard along with these individuals to obtain approval of the project. There is general agreement; however, that the person largely responsible for bringing about the realization of what often seemed a dream is the late, Hon. Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives. Speaker Rayburn promoted and persistently worked for a dam across Red River in this vicinity. His long-time, first-hand knowledge of the effects of the devastating floods on Red River below Denison and the urgent need for flood control at this point account to a great extent for his support of the project. A majority of the local people supported the project, but a well-financed, militant minority put up a long and bitter fight against it. The fight was similar to that waged against the Tennessee Valley Authority earlier. Every big undertaking has its adversary, and the Denison Dam had one in [Governor Leon C. Phillips of Oklahoma](#). The big hydroelectric project along the Texas Oklahoma border was in the rotund governor's red hair through his four years in office, and backers of the dam had many sleepless nights, especially during the two years of intermittent litigation that twice saw an injunction fight carried to the United States Supreme Court.

Gov. Philips objected to the project on the grounds, among many others, that it would inundate 100,000 acres of Oklahoma land; that the state had not been assured remuneration for road and other damages; that property owners had not been guaranteed proper compensation; it would destroy 10 miles of Oklahoma boundary, and the whole thing wasn't legal, anyhow. In short, he didn't like anything about the Denison Dam, and didn't skip any opportunities to tell the world about it.



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Concern was caused in Oklahoma quarters by the fear that an attack against legality of Denison Dam would, in effect, bring an assault on the constitutionality of all federal flood control projects in Oklahoma. This later broadened into national concern when it appeared that a successful suit against the Red River project might shake the legal status of the federal government's flood control program throughout the entire nation.

The Supreme Court, on June 2, 1941, dealt the coup de grace to the Governor's bitter struggle with a ruling holding that "the project was constitutional and that the federal government was not invading state rights.

In 1938, Congress included authorization of the Denison project in the omnibus flood control act. The official document that authorized the project is the Flood Control Act, Public Law No. 761, 75th Congress, Third Session, dated June 28, 1938.

The fact that the dam had been authorized by Congress was not conclusive proof that it would be built. Other projects had been authorized and never built. All this explains why Denison went wild with joy when on June 29, 1939, the first funds for actual construction of the dam were included in the fiscal year War Department civil functions appropriation bill passed by Congress. The allotment was 5,600,000, enough to finance work during the ensuing 12 months. As big as \$5.6 million looked to Denison, the major thrill came in the realization that Denison Dam, after a decade of struggling, finally was entered into the province of reality - That "actual construction was to start without further ceremony."

So it was on the afternoon of June 29, 1939, when a [Denison Herald](#) extra flashed the glad tidings, Denison staged an impromptu parade and celebration. Denison, of course, had eyed nervously the progress of the fiscal year appropriations measure through Congress and was all set to blow off the lid when President Roosevelt signed the bill into law. Main Street became a carnival of rejoicing as stores and offices were closed and thousands hurried to the downtown district to see and participate in the celebration. The parade, with almost everybody joining, streamed down Main Street accompanied by blaring horns and general bedlam. Not since [November 11, 1918](#), had so much enthusiasm been generated on so short notice.

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# II CONSTRUCTION PERIOD

### Organizing for the Job

The Denison District of the US Army Corps of Engineers was created with Red River Valley jurisdiction from Fulton, Arkansas to the stream's source with Captain Lucius D. Clay as the first District Engineer. The first contingent of Army Engineers established headquarters on the second and third floors of the Citizen's National Bank on Thursday, September 1, 1938. The project was designed and constructed under the direction of the Denison District Engineer Office. Contracts for the various features of the project were awarded after competitive bidding.

### Construction

On August 22, 1939, the Schutt Construction Company of Genoa, Wisconsin was given notice to proceed on the initial contract of clearing 630 acres of land at the dam site. This was one of the largest land clearing projects in American annals. The clearing program made further history in the spring of 1943, when erstwhile members of the Nazi crack Africa Corps goose-stepped into the Red River and Washita River lowlands to help with the tree cutting. These troops had been captured by the British in North Africa and brought to America for internment. These vanquished Germans were taking part in the first prisoner of war work project, one that gained wide attention. Experiences developed here helped fashion policies for other war prisoner work programs elsewhere.

The prisoners were quartered in two different internment camps, at Tishomingo and Powell, both in Oklahoma. The prisoners arrived at Tishomingo in May, 1943, and at Powell in June and soon had what was for many of them their introduction to the ancient art of cutting down trees. Some had not so much as an idea how to proceed, even notching rings around the trunks and looking puzzled when the trees refused to topple over. The prisoners eventually got into the swing of things and the overall results of the program were considered satisfactory. The prisoners cleared more than 7,300 acres of timberland.

The second contract was awarded to the George W. Condon Company and John Kerns Construction Company for excavation for the outlet works. The first carload of freight moved over the new Katy railroad spur to the Denison dam site was a car of Euclid earth conveyers shipped to Denison by the Condon and Kerns Companies on September 22, 1939. The first shovel of earth in actual construction of the Denison Dam was moved on October 2, 1939, when excavation was begun on the 3,000,000 cubic yards of earth to be removed from the outlet works channel.

A panorama of spectacular activity by the light of day, the outlet works excavation operations at the Denison Damsite became an intriguing and even mysterious fantasy under the cover of night. With two shifts, the Condon and Kerns companies, general

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contractors, worked until 11:00 PM then the sub-contractor, R.G. Aldridge, operated through the night. Lights for night operations were placed at points of vantage, on shovels, trucks and other equipment; but during the early days there was no floodlighting of the area.

The third contract was awarded to the C.F. Lytle Construction Company and provided for construction of the outlet works, consisting of a paved approach channel, the intake structure, service bridge and eight reinforced concrete conduits, five of which were steel-lined power conduits. The regular flow of concrete aggregates to the Denison Damsite for construction of the outlet works started May 9, 1940, with the delivery by way of the Katy railroad of 30 cars of crushed stone from the Southwest Stone Company's plant at Stringtown, Oklahoma. The first bucket of concrete was placed on Tuesday, May 21, 1940, in the outlet works by the Lytle Construction Company. The first concrete placed was part of the footing at the southwest corner of the intake structure which today rises to the height of thirteen-stories and is 250 feet wide. These concrete placements climaxed weeks of preparation by the contractor, during which an extensive array of shops, concrete mixing plant, unloading facilities, and other machinery were established and tested for operation.

The fourth contract was awarded to the Guy F. Atkinson Company of San Francisco, California, for the construction of the rolled earth-fill embankment and excavation of the spillway. On July 31, 1940, the first loads of earth were deposited by the trucks to begin construction of a virtual mountain consisting of an earth embankment 165 feet high with a 1500-foot base and 15,000 feet long. The first fill was placed near the center of the dam.

The C.F. Lytle Company, of Sioux City, Iowa, completed the spillway and constructed the powerhouse, with one generating unit. The turbine was supplied by the S. Morgan Smith Company and the generator by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. The Denison Dam was essentially completed and in operation for flood control in 1944.

On September 13, 1944, the reservoir impounded by the Denison Dam was officially named "Lake Texoma" by the Senate. This was the result of a bill introduced by Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma after members of the Red River Valley Improvement Association, in a meeting in Sherman, voted unanimously to suggest "Lake Texoma" as the permanent name. The name of the embankment creating the lake, however, remained "Denison Dam" and the name was embedded in the concrete wall of the powerhouse by the Engineers.

### Relocations

Creation of the reservoir necessitated the relocation of railroads, highways, and utilities, to maintain services equivalent to those existing before construction of the reservoir. It also necessitated the complete relocation of three towns and numerous cemeteries.

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A new railroad, nine miles in length and adjacent to the reservoir was constructed for the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad between Pottsboro and Sadler, Texas. Two lake bridge crossings and relocations of the track between Liggett and Platter, Oklahoma, and a lake bridge and relocation of the track south of Ravia, Oklahoma, were constructed for the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway, entailing 18.5 miles of new construction. US Highway No. 70 between Durant and Madill, Oklahoma, required nine miles of relocation to include a bridge. Relocation of Oklahoma Highway No. 99 between Tishomingo and Madill, Oklahoma, required seven miles of construction. Remedial work was required at three bridges located at Hauani, Wilson and Hickory Creeks on Oklahoma Highway No. 199 between Madill and Marietta, Oklahoma.

Most unusual and by no means the simplest phase of the Denison Dam project was the removal of graves to higher ground beyond the reach of the reservoir. Exactly 3,000 graves were moved from 49 cemeteries, ranging from family plots with one or two graves to community cemeteries, the largest containing more than 800 graves. Most of the graves were relocated in 11 new cemeteries built by the US Engineers, and others were taken at the request of relatives, to various existing burial grounds. All graves that could be located in the 186,000-acre area below the 640-foot elevation, spillway crest of the dam were removed. The actual cemetery and grave removal work started in June, 1942, and was completed in July of the next year. Prefacing this, however, was months of tedious efforts by the land section of the US Engineers in locating graves, tracing relatives, handling the necessary legal procedure and planning the cemeteries.

Reverence to the dead lent a special dignity to the entire undertaking. The curious public was not admitted to the work areas. The use of unguarded language by workers was prohibited. Rigid regulations were observed in the removal of bodies, most of them reduced to skeletons, many to dust, and their preparation for re-interment. Every possible courtesy was shown relatives when they could be located.

Denison Dam brought a complete exodus of the Aylesworth and Woodville communities in Oklahoma and the Hagerman community in Texas. The largest of these communities was Woodville, Oklahoma which contained 364 inhabitants.

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## **The Completed Job**

Denison Dam was dedicated on July 1, 1944. Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn of Bonham, Texas was the keynote speaker at the ceremonies.

Impoundment of the lake for power began on January 6, 1944, and it was not until March 15, 1945, that the normal pool elevation of 617.0 was reached. The first flood water was spilled on March 16, 1945. The lake reached the level of 643.18 on June 6, 1957. Texoma Lake reached the record level of 645.76 on May 6, 1990. Most recently on July 13, 2007 the lake reached the spillway for a third time with a level of 640.73.

## **Summary of “FACTS ABOUT LAKE TEXOMA”**

### **Watershed:**

- Drainage area above the dam is 39,719 square miles.

### **Elevation (feet above sea level):**

- Top of flood control pool - 640 feet
- Top of normal power pool - 617.25 feet
- Top of inactive pool - 590 feet
- Record Elevation on May 6, 1990 - 644.76 feet

### **Surface Area of Lake (acres):**

- At top of flood control pool - 143,000 acres
- At top of power pool - 89,000 acres Storage

### **Capacities (acre-feet):**

- Flood control pool - 2,660,000
- Power pool - 1,673,000
- Inactive pool - 1,049,000
- Lake total - 5,382,000

### **Shoreline Length (miles):**

- At top of power pool - 580 miles

### **Denison Dam:**

Embankment, length of dam - 15,200 feet

Maximum height of dam above stream bed - 165 feet

Outlet works, conduits (3) - 20 feet in diameter (for flood gates)

Power intake penstocks (2) - 20 feet in diameter (3 additional conduits unused)

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The visitation to Lake Texoma is about 6 million visitors annually spending about 90 million hours at the lake. This is largely attributed to its sheer size, which allows sports such as windsurfing and sailing, as well as its proximity to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, about an hour's drive south of the lake. Notable cities surrounding the lake in Texas are Denison, Sherman and Gainesville. In Oklahoma, notable cities are Durant and Ardmore. The Lake Texoma area, known simply as Texoma or Texomaland to locals, is experiencing a rapid period of economic growth due to its large number of tourists. There are over twenty concessions lining the shores of the lake and millions of dollars have been invested in homes along the 580 miles of shoreline. Many large cruiser type boats are berthed on the lake and can be seen peacefully plowing the deep blue waters on busy weekends. The lake that many "old-timers" feared would never be clear, is a beautiful, clear lake where fishing, boating, skiing, and other water-oriented activities flourish.

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### **END NOTES**

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Note: All references to Denison Herald pertain to clippings on file in the Denison Dam Resident Office, US Army Corps of Engineers, Denison, Texas.

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